

from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, where they had been waiting for the weather at Shemya to clear. Blizzard conditions and extreme crosswinds were ravaging the small exposed island. This weather was not uncommon, just another day at the office for 55th Wing aircrew. However, after receiving clearance to land, weather conditions deteriorated rapidly.

□ 1045

Firsthand accounts from crewmembers onboard describe the violent buffeting they experienced on descent as like being on the end of a yo-yo. The belly of the aircraft struck the edge of a cliff on the approach end of the runway, shearing off the landing gear. As the damaged aircraft slammed into the runway, engines three and four exploded and the fuselage broke in half. Flames engulfed the crew compartment as the disintegrating aircraft slid 2,000 feet, eventually careening off the runway and down a hill.

The scene was chaotic as crewmembers worked to free themselves and their teammates from the burning wreckage while the blizzard raged. Miraculously, 18 crewmembers escaped from the flames that day. Their bodies burned and broken, they worked feverishly to extract their fellow airmen from the fiery wreckage.

In the end, six men died on that lonely airfield that day. Their names were:

Major William Bennett,
Captain Larry Mayfield,
First Lieutenant Loren Ginter,
Master Sergeant Stephen Kish,
Staff Sergeant Steven Balcer, and
Staff Sergeant Harry Parsons, III.

We honor their service and their sacrifice and commend their spirit to the Creator. We pray for their families and loved ones who cherish their memory. We also honor the survivors of this tragic crash who will forever bear the scars of their service and the memory of that day. May we never forget what they gave to the cause of freedom, and that it was the dedication of warriors like these that won the Cold War. And may we pledge to honor their sacrifice by recommitting ourselves to eternal vigilance in the defense of freedom.

PROTECTING QUALITY OF LIFE OF VETERANS IS A TOP PRIORITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. LURIA) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2368, the COVENANT Act, legislation to ensure our Nation's veterans can receive the benefits they deserve after being exposed to toxic substances in the course of their service.

Mr. Speaker, protecting the quality of life of our veterans is a top priority of this Congress, and particularly for my colleagues on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, where I chair the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee.

One such veteran I have the privilege of representing, Master Sergeant Brian Graves of Virginia Beach, flew missions over the Middle East for the United States Air Force. Today, he lives with breathing problems after inhaling jet fumes and being exposed to other toxins during his time of service.

The COVENANT Act will dramatically streamline the VA benefits process for thousands of veterans like Master Sergeant Graves.

Between June 2007 and February 2021, we know that 13,900 veterans filed a disability benefit claim related to toxic exposure. Mr. Speaker, of those nearly 14,000 veterans, only 4,000 claims were granted. That is simply unacceptable. We cannot allow history to repeat itself. Veterans like myself watched our peers who served in Vietnam wait decades for the benefits they deserve.

The recent veterans who served in the Middle East, southwest Asia, east Africa, and the Philippines need our help today. Mr. Speaker, they are hurting and, in some cases, dying. Congress must not neglect them in their time of need.

That is why I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the COVENANT Act, a comprehensive approach to securing benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances overseas.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF CORPUS CHRISTI POLICE CHIEF MIKE MARKLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CLOUD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CLOUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Corpus Christi, Texas Police Chief Mike Markle on his career of public service, and to congratulate him on his upcoming retirement.

From his service in the United States Navy as a hospital corpsman to his 31-year career service at the Corpus Christi Police Department, Chief Markle has consistently placed the needs of others before himself. Enlisting in the police academy in 1989, he protected the streets for many years with courage and determination. He has served as a field training officer, on the Honor Guard, and on the SWAT team.

Corpus Christi turned to him to lead during the Police Department's transition in 2015. As head of the Corpus Christi PD, he pursued excellence in leadership and a commitment to learning. His priority was to improve community outreach and address the modern challenges of policing.

His legacy of helping others stretches beyond his police work, as he currently serves on the board of directors for the Wesley Community Center. There is no question that Chief Markle left a lasting impact on the Coastal Bend region, and he will be sorely missed.

I thank him for his commitment to protecting the citizens of Corpus Christi, and I wish him well in his future endeavors.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Margaret Grun Kibben, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, we earnestly pray today to walk in Your presence. With You beside us, may Your nearness both inspire and compel us to take steps in response to Your divine mercy, in obedience to Your divine guidance, and in gratitude for Your divine compassion for us.

May each thought that comes to our minds be of Your will.

May each aspiration our souls conjure be worthy of Your blessing.

May every action we take reveal Your love to those who need it so desperately.

May every word we speak give honor to You.

It is our humble prayer that in everything we do today, we would be instruments of Your transcendent love in this place, of Your sacrificial love for all of creation, and of Your redeeming love for this world and for each of Your children.

We offer ourselves to You in the hope of Your mercy and in the strength of Your name.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to section 11(a) of House Resolution 188, the Journal of the last day's proceedings is approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. FEENSTRA) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. FEENSTRA led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.